

OMB Policies for for Federal Public Websites – What Are They and What Do They Mean?

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Background



- E-Gov Act of 2002 required OMB to establish Interagency Committee on Government Information (ICGI) to implement specific sections of the Act
- ICGI formed 3 Working Groups to address requirements
- Web Content Management Working Group charged with addressing Section 207(f)(1) & (2), policies for federal public websites
- Working Group comprised of federal Web Managers, across government
 - ❖ Sponsor: Bev Godwin, Director of FirstGov

Background



Goal: Make government websites in the U.S. the most citizen-centered and visitor-friendly in the world

Objectives:

- Make it easier for all Americans to find and use government information and services on the Internet
- Provide more standardization and higher overall quality of government websites
- Share best practices across government



Background

- **Researched existing laws, regulations, and policies**
 - ❖ 27 laws, regs, guidelines related to federal websites
- **Identified existing common content practices on federal websites**
- **Consulted with the public and stakeholders**
- **Vetted the draft widely – received more than 100 sets of comments**
- **Sent 43 recommendations to the ICGL in June 2004**
- **ICGL adopted all recommendations; sent report to OMB**
- **OMB issued “Policies for Federal Public Websites,” 12-17-2004**
- **Working Group helps Web Managers implement policies**
 - ❖ Established webcontent.gov – “Web Content Managers Toolkit”
 - ❖ Conducting workshops
 - ❖ Working with Web Content Managers Forum

The Federal Web Content Managers Toolkit

A Practical Guide for Managing U.S. Federal Public Websites

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Topics

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Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites

On December 17, 2004, OMB issued [Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites](#). The policies refer agencies to the recommendations and best practices contained in this toolkit to aid implementation of the new and existing policies. Read the [implementation guidance](#).

News

Register for the Chicago Regional Workshop on June 7

The Web Content Working Group will host regional workshops for government web managers in Chicago on June 7 and in Denver on July 28. [Register for the Chicago workshop today](#). You can register for the Denver workshop beginning in June.

New Resources on Web Governance

Find web governance models, policies and procedures from other agencies, sample job descriptions and much more in our new [Web Management and Governance](#) section.

Looking for a Job as a Government Web Manager?

Check out our new [Job Openings](#) page. Find current vacancies for web managers, content specialists, and other web-related positions with government agencies.

Want to Improve Your Web Content?

Check out the redesigned site of [Plainlanguage.gov](#). Find great writing examples, training opportunities, and tips on encouraging plain language within your agency.

June 16, 2005: Next Web Content Managers Forum Meeting

The next monthly Forum conference call will be from 10 - 11 am EST, on June 16th. Details will be forthcoming on the Forum Listserv. If you're not a Forum member, [learn how you can join!](#)

Search

Tell Us What You Think About the Toolkit

This site has been developed for Web Content Managers by your peers. We want your ideas for expanding and improving the site!

Last Reviewed: May 25, 2005



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

DEPUTY DIRECTOR
FOR MANAGEMENT

December 17, 2004

M-05-04

MEMORANDUM FOR THE HEADS OF EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

FROM:

Clay Johnson III
Deputy Director for Management

SUBJECT:

Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites

The efficient, effective, and appropriately consistent use of Federal agency public websites is important to promote a more citizen centered government. This memorandum and attachment fulfill the requirements of section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002 (Pub. L. No. 107-347). Overall, the management of agencies' public websites should be in compliance with Federal information resource management law and policy.

Federal agency public websites are information resources funded in whole or in part by the Federal government and operated by an agency, contractor, or other organization on behalf of the agency. They present government information or provide services to the public or a specific non-Federal user group and support the proper performance of an agency function. Federal agency public websites are also information dissemination products as defined in Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-130, "Management of Federal Information Resources." Agencies must manage Federal agency public websites as part of their information resource management program following guidance in OMB Circular A-130, OMB "Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Information Disseminated by Federal Agencies" (67 FR 5365), this memorandum, and other information policy issuances.

OMB expects prompt and orderly implementation of the policies in this memorandum and its attachment. OMB expects agencies to become fully compliant with new requirements by 12/31/05 and continue to adhere to existing requirements. OMB will monitor agency compliance with these policies as part of its oversight of agency information resource management programs. The recommendations and best practices published by the Interagency Committee on Government Information (<http://www.webcontent.gov>) will aid your implementation of the policies outlined in the attachment.

If you have any questions regarding this memorandum, please contact Kimberly Nelson (202) 395-3787 K.Nelson@omb.eop.gov, or Daniel Costello (202) 395-7857 D.Costello@omb.eop.gov. Policy Analysts, Information Policy and Technology Branch, Office of Management and Budget.

Attachment

OMB Cover Memo

Two key points

- Defines “federal public websites”

“Federal agency public websites are information resources funded in whole or in part by the Federal government and operated by an agency, contractor, or other organization on behalf of the agency. They present government information or provide services to the public or a specific non-Federal user group and support the proper performance of an agency function.”

Translation: Follow the money. Mission-related.

- Refers to the ICGL report and webcontent.gov for implementation guidance

“The recommendations and best practices published by the Interagency Committee on Government Information (<http://www.webcontent.gov>) will aid your implementation of the policies outlined in the attachment.”



Policy 1 – What It Says



Establish and maintain information dissemination product inventories, priorities, and schedules

- Disseminate information to the public in a timely, equitable, efficient and appropriate manner and maintain inventories of information
- Develop priorities and schedules for making government information available and accessible to the public, and post this information on the agency's website
- Post any updates to the agency's final inventories, priorities, and schedules; and include this information in the agency's annual E-Government Act report

Policy 1 – What It Means



- Key words: “timely, equitable, efficient, appropriate”
- Working Group recommendations:
 - ❖ Provide access to documents in different file formats (equitable)
 - ❖ Provide access for people with disabilities (equitable)
 - ❖ Provide access to people with limited English proficiency (equitable)
 - ❖ Provide common access to a broad range of visitors (equitable)
 - ❖ Provide dates and ensure content is current (timely)
 - ❖ Organize content according to citizen needs (appropriate)
 - ❖ Use basic common content and placement (efficient, appropriate)
 - Contact information
 - Site map or subject index
 - Common or Frequently Asked Questions
 - Online services
 - Forms and publications
 - Jobs
 - Information about regulations
 - Information about grants and contracts

Policy 1 – What It Means



- ❖ Measure customer satisfaction and usability (efficient, appropriate)
 - ❖ Write and organize homepage from the viewpoint of the public (efficient, appropriate)
 - ❖ Use consistent navigation (efficient)
 - ❖ Use plain language (appropriate)
 - ❖ Link to the home page (efficient)
 - ❖ Ensure continuity of operations during emergencies (timely)
 - ❖ Avoid duplication (efficient)
 - ❖ Collaborate in developing cross-agency portals (efficient)
 - ❖ Inform audiences of website changes (efficient)
-
- Suggested procedures for establishing priorities and schedules for posting content - Section 207 (f)(2)
 - ❖ Was due 12/04



Policy 2 – What It Says

Ensure information quality

- Maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information and services provided to the public
- Make information and services available on a timely and equitable basis
- Assure suitable information and service quality, consistent with the level of importance of the information



Policy 2 – What It Means

- Key words: quality, objectivity, utility, integrity, timely, equitable
- Quality – challenges us to post only information that we know to be accurate and to inform the public if we are not sure
- Objectivity – challenges us to keep information and services balanced
- ICGI recommendations:
 - ❖ Same ones as the first policy
 - ❖ Ensure information quality (quality)
 - ❖ Avoid publishing information on the public website that is just for employees (utility)



Policy 3 – What It Says

Establish and enforce agency-wide linking policies

- Establish and enforce explicit policies for linking within and beyond the agency
- Limit external linking to information or services necessary for proper performance of an agency function
- Include reasonable controls to assure external links remain active and continue to provide quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity
- Choose external links carefully because even though OMB's information quality guidelines don't specifically mention links, agencies are expected to apply good judgment

Policy 3 continued



- **Links to commercial organizations or interest groups present special challenges with respect to maintaining agency objectivity and thus must be used judiciously**

- **Clearly present mandatory information. Post or link to the following from your front page and each major entry point:**
 - ❖ Agency's strategic plan and annual performance plans
 - ❖ Organization structure, mission, and authority
 - ❖ Information made available under the Freedom of Information Act
 - ❖ Website privacy policies
 - ❖ Firstgov.gov

- **EEO data related to whistleblower complaints (No Fear Act of 2002)**
 - ❖ Point of contact for small businesses
 - ❖ Cross-agency portals or links required by law or policy



Policy 3 – What It Means

- Key points: Links, quality of information, and – again - objectivity
- Concerned about
 - ❖ Linking to information that may not be accurate
 - ❖ Keeping web content “objective”
 - ❖ Ensuring certain information is available on all websites
- ICGI recommendations:
 - ❖ Follow basic linking practices
 - ❖ Include required links
 - ❖ Post strategic plans
 - ❖ Post a link to FOIA
 - ❖ Post a link to privacy policies
 - ❖ Post a link to No Fear data
 - ❖ Post a small business point-of-contact
 - ❖ Post strategic and performance plans and organizational info
 - ❖ Post a link to FirstGov
 - ❖ Links to other cross-agency portals

Policy 4 – What It Says



Communicate with the public, state and local governments

- Communicate with the public and with state and local governments to ensure the agency creates information dissemination products meeting their needs
- Manage information collection from the public or state and local governments (including website surveys or questionnaires) according to OMB guidance

Policy 4 – What It Means



- Talk to your audiences
 - ❖ Know what they want and need; and provide it
- ICGL recommendations
 - ❖ Measure customer satisfaction and usability and use results to improve your website
 - ❖ Follow the Paperwork Reduction Act

Policy 5 – What It Says

Search public websites



- Assist the public in locating government information
- Include a search function on your principal public website and any major entry point
 - ❖ Small websites can use site maps or subject indexes
- By 12/31/2005, search must cover all files intended for public use, display results in order of relevancy to criteria, and provide response times appropriately equivalent to industry best practices
- By 12/31/2005, provide data in an open, industry standard format permitting the audience to aggregate, disaggregate, or manipulate and analyze the data according to their needs

Policy 5 continued

- OMB may issue additional policies about searches by 12/17/2005



Policy 5 – What It Means



■ Keys

- ❖ Have a search function or (for smaller sites) a site index or map
- ❖ Watch file formats
- ❖ Create data so it can be combined and sorted - metadata, XML schemas can help

■ ICGI recommendations

- ❖ Categorization of Information
- ❖ Have a search and establish search standards
- ❖ Use standard metadata
- ❖ Provide appropriate access to data
- ❖ Inform audiences of website changes



Policy 6 – What It Says

Use approved domains

- Use only .gov, .mil, or fed.us domains
 - ❖ Exceptions only if Agency head explicitly decides that another domain is necessary for the proper performance of an agency function

Policy 6 – What It Means



- Very important – federal websites not on .gov or .mil or .fed.us must be moved to .gov or .mil or .fed.us
 - ❖ Also refers to “sponsorship” and the importance of showing government sponsorship
 - ❖ Usability testing showed URLs are very important in establishing public trust
- ICGI recommendations:
 - ❖ Use Government domains
 - ❖ Show U.S. sponsorship



Policy 7 – What It Says

Implement security controls

- Provide **security policies** to ensure information is resistant to tampering, remains confidential, and is available as intended by the agency and expected by the audience
- Agencies must implement **management controls** to prevent inappropriate disclosure of sensitive information

Policy 7 – What It Means



- Security - not exactly a content issue – but important for content managers and contributors to know
- ICGI recommendation:
 - ❖ Establish security protocols to protect information



Policy 8 – What It Says

Protect privacy

- Protect the privacy of information about the public by continuing to implement OMB standards and guidance
 - ❖ Post privacy policies on websites, telling visitors the organization's legal authority for collecting personal data and how the data will be used

Policy 8 – What It Means



- Privacy – not new...just re-emphasized
- ICGL recommendation:
 - ❖ Implement privacy requirements



Policy 9 – What It Says

Maintain accessibility

- Make information and services fully available to individuals with disabilities (complying with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act)
- Provide appropriate access for people with limited English proficiency
 - ❖ Agencies must determine whether any individual document on their Federal agency public website(s) requires translation

Policy 9 – What It Means



- Accessibility – also not new
 - ❖ 508 policies already well-known
 - ❖ LEP – could present challenges for web managers
 - ❖ Working Group: accessibility also applies to people with low bandwidth, people who don't own certain proprietary software

- ICGI recommendations
 - ❖ Provide access for people with disabilities
 - ❖ Provide access to people with limited English proficiency
 - ❖ Provide common access to a broad range of visitors



Policy 10 – What It Says

Manage records

- Meet records management requirements by implementing OMB Circular A-130 and guidance from the National Archives and Records Administration

Policy 10 – What It Means



- Establish procedures to handle web records
 - ❖ Working Group is working with NARA to establish best practices on this
- ICGL recommendation
 - ❖ Comply with records management



OMB A-130

How Does It Relate?

- OMB policies refer to OMB A-130 throughout...so what is it?
- Written before the web – but clearly has web implications
- A few highlights
- Section 7a
- ❖ **What It Says:** Federal Government is the largest single producer, collector, consumer, and disseminator of information in the United States
- ❖ **What It Means:** Your website(s) are a significant means for delivering government information to the public



OMB A-130

How Does It Relate?

■ Section 7b

- ❖ **What It Says:** Government information is a valuable national resource. It provides the public with knowledge of the government, society, and economy – past, present, and future. It is a means to ensure the accountability of government, to manage the government's operations, to maintain the healthy performance of the economy, and **is itself a commodity in the marketplace.**

- ❖ **What It Means:**
 - This is a biggie! Government information is, itself, a product that we need to manage effectively
 - Public depends on our providing this product
 - Website(s) can be one of the most efficient and effective ways to do that



OMB A-130

How Does It Relate?

■ Section 7c

- ❖ **What It Says:** The free flow of information between the government and the public is essential to a democratic society. It is also essential that the government minimize the Federal paperwork burden on the public, minimize the cost of its information activities, and maximize the usefulness

- ❖ **What It Means:**
 - Our websites are an excellent way to provide information to and exchange information with the public
 - We need to do our very best to manage our websites efficiently and effectively, to give the public the most “bang for the buck.”

OMB A-130

How Does It Relate?

■ Section 7d

- ❖ **What It Says:** In order to minimize the cost and maximize the usefulness of government information, the expected public and private benefits derived from government information should exceed the public and private costs of the information, recognizing that the benefits to be derived from government information may not always be quantifiable.
- ❖ **What It Means:** Though we can't always put a dollar amount on the value of the information on our websites to the public, we need to do our best to make sure that the cost of creating and managing our web content doesn't exceed the value.



OMB A-130

How Does It Relate?

Section 7e



- ❖ **What It Says:** The nation can benefit from government information disseminated both by federal agencies and by diverse nonfederal parties, including state and local government agencies, educational and other not-for-profit institutions, and for-profit organizations.
- ❖ **What It Means:** We should work with our partners – both government and private – to trade links, combine content, and distribute our information and services to the widest audience

OMB A-130 How Does It Relate?

■ Section 7j

- ❖ **What It Says:** Because state and local governments are important producers of government information for many areas such as health, social welfare, labor, transportation, and education, the federal government must cooperate with these governments in the management of information resources.
- ❖ **What It Means:** We need to work with our state and local partners to combine and present government information efficiently and effectively





OMB A-130 How Does It Relate?

■ Section 8(a) (1) (b)

- ❖ **What It Says:** Consider the effects of actions on members of the public and ensure consultation with the public as appropriate
- ❖ **What It Means:**
 - Reach out to the public to find out what they want on your website
 - Listen to the feedback you are receiving from the public
 - Measure usability and customer satisfaction and use it to improve your website



OMB A-130

How Does It Relate?

■ Section 8(a) (1)(d)

- ❖ **What It Says:** Seek to satisfy new information needs through interagency or intergovernmental sharing of information, or through commercial sources, where appropriate, before creating or collecting new information

- ❖ **What It Means:**
 - Avoid duplication - create content once and use it many times through links
 - Collaborate with other organizations or agencies on content
 - Develop cross-agency websites as appropriate
 - Use metadata that is common across the government to help aggregate information on the same subject or for the same audience



OMB A-130

How Does It Relate?

■ Section 8(a) (1) (k)(2)

- ❖ **What It Says:** Agencies must collect or create only that information necessary for the proper performance of agency functions and which has practical utility

- ❖ **What It Means:**
 - Ensure that your web content is mission-related
 - Ensure that any information collected through the website is essential for achievement of the agency's mission
 - Consult with the public to make sure that the information you are providing is practical for them
 - Avoid using the public website to provide information that only is important to employees – it can be confusing to the public



OMB A-130 How Does It Relate?

■ Section 8(a) (1) (k)(2)

- ❖ **What It Says:** Consider whether an information dissemination product available from other Federal or nonfederal sources is equivalent to an agency information dissemination product and reasonably fulfills the dissemination responsibilities of the agency
- ❖ **What It Means:**
 - Do not duplicate efforts. If information or services are available elsewhere and they fulfill or supplement the agency's mission, link to it.
 - If content bridges organizations or agencies, work with the other organizations and agencies to develop one source for the content

Bottom Line



- Working Group: If you're trying to figure out what to do with your website, ask yourself this:

“What is the right thing to do for the people we serve?”

Then DO IT!

What's Next?

■ Working Group

- ❖ Strategic plan for next 3-5 years
- ❖ Enhance webcontent.gov
- ❖ More workshops
 - Denver: July 28
 - Washington DC: Sept 20-22
- ❖ More work!
 - Task groups forming
 - Need field involvement - need field outreach



What can you do?

- ❖ Join the Web Content Managers Forum
 - Sign up through webcontent.gov
- ❖ Join a task group
 - ❖ Visit webcontent.gov...often!
 - ❖ Work across agencies to aggregate content/share best practices
 - ❖ Tell your colleagues



Questions? Comments?

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